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Carl E. Lind

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An Emotional High

by Carl E. Lind

For me there were many emotional peaks and valleys in World War II. One exciting period in my Army career, was the time I spent in the Military Attache office at the American Legation in Stockholm, Sweden. Circumstances leading to my being there began in early 1944. I was stationed at First Army Headquarters, Governors Island, New York, in G-2 (Military Intelligence). One of our officers, Colonel Arnesen of Norwegian ancestry was being re-assigned to Stockholm, Sweden. I told him of my Swedish parentage and a desire to join him if there were openings to enlisted personnel.

Within days of Colonel Arnesen's arriving at the Pentagon for briefing, I was called into the office of the boss of G-2, also a Colonel, who asked, "Carl, do you want to take a long plane ride? I said, "My bags are packed," hoping that this would mean Sweden. Orders were cut and off I went to the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., for a 30 day briefing on duties in Stockholm, most of which would involve secret codes. I was given \$300 and told to buy civilian clothes to wear instead of my Army duds. Sweden was a neutral country, completely surrounded by German-occupied countries: Norway on the west, Finland on the east, on the south Denmark, to the southeast Balticum (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania). Civilian clothes were less conspicuous than Army uniforms, important since Sweden was spy headquarters of all nations and we were a part of that environment. We gathered information and transmitted it by secret code, to M.I.S. (Military Intelligence Service) in Washington and SHAEF (Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force) in London. That was what my work involved.

Off I went (on my very first airplane ride) across the Atlantic to England where I met up with Colonel Arnesen. He was in London waiting for a flight to Sweden and was anxious to get underway. I too was anxious, for on my first night in London we had an air raid alert which turned out to be the beginning of buzz bombs. These were unmanned projectiles launched from Germany, that created another wave of terror and destruction in England. As soon as we had good nighttime cloud cover, six of us took off from Prestwick, Scotland in an unheated mosquito bomber. We were garbed in heavily insulated airforce jumpsuits, boots, gloves and headgear. That was a bit scary when you think of the German "ack-ack" guns waiting to shoot us out of the sky over Denmark or Norway. Fortunately the journey was a safe one to our destination.

The place I chose to live in Stockholm was a pensionat (boarding house). This was interesting, partly because some of my military friends stayed there, but mostly there were refugees from the occupied countries. Madame Lupe was an opera singer from Rumania, whom we heard sing Carmen at the Swedish Opera House. There was a lady legislator from the Storting (Norwegian Parliament), with whom I swapped ration cards. She was elderly, quite chubby, and not greatly in need of much food. I was young, skinny, and hungry for something other than our daily diet of fish. She gave me her meat cards in exchange for my tobacco coupons (she smoked cigars). There were refugee writers and business people living there as well. This was quite a cultural cross section of humanity with mealtime being a babel of foreign sounds. Because I spoke some Swedish and represented American involvement in the war to free their countries, they were very friendly to me. They lived in a constant state of anxiety over their loved ones at home, and progress of the war. Then came D-Day, June 6, 1944, the greatest invasion in history, followed by daily armadas of American bombers hammering away at critical targets in Germany. Many of our bombers were badly shot up, ran short of fuel, and couldn't get home to their base in England. These flyers force-landed in Sweden, and since it was a neutral country, they had to be interned. Eventually, our airmen totalled 1,200 along with 120 damaged aircraft that brought them there. Sadly in a cemetery in Malmö, Sweden, there are many highly visible white crosses in graves of our countrymen who gave their lives in a winning cause.

And then it was over (in Europe at least), V-Day May 8, 1945. I was saddled with duty that day, but was told, and later read in the newspapers, that in celebration there was singing and

dancing in the in the streets which were inches deep in confetti and shredded newspapers.

It was rumored that the German surrender would be consummated in Sweden. Our Military Attache's charge to me was to remain on duty to receive a possible confirming message that the signing would happen in Sweden. For hours I waited, nervous as I have ever been. All top-secret codes and instructions were at readiness on the desk in my tightly secured office. Word came that it wouldn't happen in Sweden, which was an all clear signal for me. I buttoned up the safe, closed shop, and happily trudged homeward. My heart was warm with thankfulness! While I had missed the celebration, and the big massge I awaited didn't happen, what a relief it was to know that the Germans had finally been brought to their knees. I was tired, the say had been long, and the anticipation and excitement of an historic event unfolding totally drained my energy.

The hour was late when I arrived at my pensionat after 9 PM, long past dinner. I went to the dining room anyway hoping to rustle up a sandwich. When I entered, it was vacant and silent. On the table there was one place setting: a plate, silverware, a glass, napkin, and a lonely chair. It was an eerie feeling I had, but I supposed it was just that I was terribly tired. Mrs. Sjunesson, the owner, appeared and I said "Sorry I'm late, is it O.K. if I sit here, and is there anything left to eat?" She responded "Yes Carl, you are more than welcome."

Suddenly from behind my back in the adjoining parlor there was a comotion. Someone was playing the piano. The large number of people assembled began singing "America" (My Country 'Tis of Thee, Sweet Land of Liberty). That was my country! Was this a dream?

Then I was surrounded by my refugee friends who had been waiting for me in the parlor, who that day had finally regained their long-sought freedom. They embraced me, kissed me, thanked me, for America making it possible. They cried for their joy, and being overwhelmed I found myself tearing, too.

Never have my emotions risen to such a height, realizing what an enormous thing my country had done, making the ultimate sacrifice in the cause of freedom, and fulfilling a commitment to all these good people. How great it was to be an American that night!